
The Gifts of the Christians

1. The Size of the Gifts.
2. The Danger of the Small Gifts.
3. The Cause and Cure of Financial Laziness.

By

Professor H. Pieper, D. D.

Done into English by

Professor W. G. Palack

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The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants, will arise and build. Neh. 2, 20. For the people had a mind to work. Neh. 4, 6.



THE GIFTS OF THE CHRISTIANS

It is reported that two religious denominations of the United States never have financial difficulties. These are the Mormons and the Seventh Day Adventists. The reason for this is said to be that these denominations have introduced the tithe. Other denominations, too, have members who have recommended the introduction of the tithe.

How do we stand on this question? We do not, to be sure, make the tithe a matter of duty and conscience for the Christians of the New Testament. To do so would be unscriptural. The tithe was God's ordinance in the Old Testament, but it is not divine ordinance in the New Testament. The New Testament frequently speaks of giving for Christ's kingdom, but nowhere does it command the Christians to give the tithe. And what Christ has not commanded, the Church and the individual dare not command to others. We intend to maintain this position firmly over and against popery and the sects. We shall not permit ourselves to be deprived of the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.

On the other hand it is also of the highest importance to be reminded not to use the liberty, wherewith Christ has made us free, for a cloak of sin. For although the tithe is not prescribed for us, *it is and remains divine ordinance that the Christians of the New Testament give themselves to Christ with all their earthly goods, and at all times, willingly, place at the disposal of His Church whatever He requires.*

This is the teaching of Scripture. By faith in the Gospel, the Christians depart from the kingdom of darkness and enter into the kingdom of Christ, the Christian Church. With their entry they bring along everything they possess: body and soul with all their faculties, *also their earthly goods.* In the 60th chapter of his prophecy, Isaiah describes, as in a large picture, the entry of the nations into the Christian Church: "Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah" (4-6).

Surely a magnificent picture! But the Holy Ghost has painted into this magnificent, heart-stirring picture also the "financial activity." The people who go into the Church with song and praise bring along all their earthly goods, their silver and gold. For the prophet adds: "All they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall

show forth the praises of the Lord," and, "Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee."

At synods I have mentioned in passing, and also written in our periodicals, that, as a Church, we are also not poor in earthly goods, because the Church possesses just as much earthly goods as the combined wealth of all its members. Many have, therefore, called me an optimist, that is, one who sees everything from the bright side. But this optimistic view that the Church possesses as much as all its members taken together is entirely scriptural, and is plainly shown in the above-mentioned quotations from Isaiah's prophecy.

The situation is this: the Christians, as such, are willing to place themselves and all their wealth into the service of the Church, and at all times to give to the Savior whatever He wants. We can say with Luther: In our days, too, many are more than willing to serve their Savior with their earthly possessions. We know of instances in which not only a tenth of the income is given, but 25%. We have among us such as tithe of their own free will, also such as give 11%—in order to distinguish themselves from the Jews—as well as such as have said: *Everything that I make in my business shall be placed into the service of my Savior.*

Many weaknesses cling to the Christians, but, as far as they are Christians or new creatures, they give themselves *without reserve*, with all they possess,—*also their earthly goods*,—to their Savior. A St. Louis business man, who died a few years ago, said: "I conduct my business for my Savior." And he not only said this, but he acted accordingly.

Of course the Christians are not wholly spiritual, but still have their evil flesh. And according to the flesh they are miserly and always seek to withhold from Christ what He needs for His kingdom. When the Lord lets them know that in connection with His entry into the world He has need of their colt, they perhaps permit their flesh to have the first word and inform Him that they have need of their colt themselves. And in many instances the flesh keeps the last word in the matter. The Lord, who shed His blood for His own, cannot obtain from such the requested colt. The flesh of the Christians too is just that evil and mean. For this reason the spirit must needs be strengthened continually through the Gospel in order to destroy the works of the flesh. And the old man must needs be bridled outwardly by means of threats and punishment, so that the works of the spirit may not be hindered overmuch.

1. THE SIZE OF THE GIFTS

The question has been raised: Why is it that the amount of their gifts is not prescribed for the Christians of the New Testament? Some members of our congregations would like to have the amount set. When they see the results obtained by the Papists, Mormons, and Seventh Day

Adventists by means of their laws on giving, they are inclined to try legalistic methods too. It is not right, however, to use wrongful methods for the purpose of doing good; and we do wrong every time we make demands which exceed the bounds set by the Word of God. In the Old Testament the tithe was commanded by God; *it had to be given*. In the New Testament, however, the amount of the gifts is a matter of freedom. The reason why the amount of their gifts is left to the New Testament Christians, and the legalistic ordinance of the tithe has been abolished, is given Gal. 4, 1ff.: "The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world."

Since Christ is fully revealed, the New Testament Christians are no longer children, but persons who are spiritually *of age*; therefore the Christians of the New Testament, *moved by the willing spirit of adoption*, do the will of God in financial matters far beyond all that done by the people of the Old Testament by force of outward statutes. It is a part of our Christian liberty that we may set the amount of our gifts ourselves.

It is a terrible *abuse* of Christian liberty, however, if the Christians use their freedom from the tithe in such a manner that as little as possible or nothing at all is given Christ for His kingdom. They then use their liberty as a cloak of the maliciousness of their flesh. They are then doing that against which the apostle warns with the words: "As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness," 1 Peter 2, 16.

God has removed from the New Testament Christians the yoke of bondage, of force, of the tithe, for the purpose and with the expectation that they serve Him not less, but more; that they bring their offerings, *willingly*, in the beauty of holiness; that they place *all* they possess at His disposal, and actually hand over to Him at all times whatever He may be in need of. And, behold, they *disappoint* God, so to speak.

The Lord had His troubles with the Jews, who cheated Him in the tithe and tried to curtail either the quantity or the quality of it. Read, for example, Mal. 1, 8; 3, 8ff. The passage reads: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings."

In the same way God has His troubles with the Christians today. He freed them from the tithe with the intention that they might serve Him more diligently in this freedom. But they abuse the liberty. Instead of giving God 11% of their own free will, they use their liberty to satisfy God with 1% or even less.

Someone has said, and not incorrectly, that the weakest Christian should begin there where the Jew stopped, namely with 10%, in order, according to his Christian liberty, to strive continually for a higher goal. There are those among us who do this. But we must also complain with

Luther: Very many Christians use their liberty for a cloak of maliciousness.

This abuse of Christian liberty was found, of course, also in the Apostolic Church, and Paul labeled it an insult to God, with the words: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked!" The context plainly shows that the apostle is here speaking of *Christian giving*. The flesh of the Christians in the Apostolic Church was just as malicious as is the flesh of the Christians in our own time. For that reason the apostle uses such strong, terrible words: "Be not deceived, God is not *mocked*!"

The abuse of Christian liberty, with respect to giving for the Gospel which we have in so rich a measure, is found also among us. We would have to close our eyes to the evident facts, if we would not admit this; and we must, with the grace of God, seek to abolish it. We owe this to our Savior, to our Church, to ourselves, as we shall see.

2. THE DANGER OF SMALL GIFTS

The small gifts have their great glory. The smallest gifts will be honored to the last day wherever there is still a Holy Bible. For the Bible tells us that the "mite" of the widow, who cast a farthing into the treasury, was a greater gift than all the gifts of the rich; for all they did cast in of their abundance, the widow, however, of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living. Mark 12, 41-44.

Under certain circumstances, then, the smallest gift has the highest value. But woe! if the "mite" is *abused* by such as are not poor widows, —but are rich in this world's goods,—to *strive* after the smallest gifts possible and then to quiet their conscience with the "widow's mite." Through the devil's trickery the widow's mite is in many cases used for a cloak of avarice. Let us note the dangers that in so many instances are connected with the small gifts.

AGAINST THE WILL OF GOD

Seeking after small and few gifts is contrary to the will of God. The Holy Scriptures warn against giving sparingly and admonish to liberal giving, when we read: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." 2 Cor. 9, 6. And the apostle praises the congregations in Macedonia. "Their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." 2 Cor. 8, 2.

SPOIL THE QUALITY OF THE GIFTS

Small gifts in many cases spoil the *quality* of the gifts; that is, the small gifts are evidence of the fact that one does not give to the Savior and that the giving is not done willingly. Of course there are unimportant things in which small gifts are entirely in place. However, when the great things of the kingdom of God are directly concerned: the preaching of the Gospel, missions, institutions of the Church, etc., those

very things for the performance of which the Christians are still in this world (Matt. 24, 14) ; if, in these instances, we strive after the smallest gifts possible, then the danger is very near that we do not think of our Savior at all in this connection, that we do not sacrifice to Him, but merely give mechanically in order to keep up the *appearance* of giving.

If we think of the Savior who has given Himself wholly for us, and now desires that we out of gratitude should place ourselves into the service of the preaching of the Gospel: if we think of this, it cannot be otherwise but that we will strive not to give as little as possible, but as much as we possibly can. Seeking after small gifts in this case does not show a willingness to serve Christ in the beauty of holiness, but rather the very opposite, unwillingness and miserliness. And so the small gifts become worthless before God.

Even among Christians self-delusion very easily insinuates itself because of the miserly flesh which still clings to us. It happens that a Christian feels he could and should do more for the Gospel than he actually does. He feels that the amount of his gifts is not at all in proportion to his means and the importance of the cause. But he nevertheless clings to small gifts and inwardly torments himself trying to substitute the lack of quantity with quality, persuading himself that he is giving his little gift "right heartily." To say: "Little, but from the heart," is fully justified under certain circumstances, as when a person really has only a little. It is then that we come near to the *glory* of the widow's "mite." But if conscience reminds us that, considering our means and the importance of the cause, we could and should give more, then the "little, but right heartily" may easily hide a self-delusion. All inward stressing of quality will be futile and will not make amends for any lack in quantity. Here one had rather think of another proverb: "quality goes with quantity." May we then watch carefully the amount of our gifts! The Lord will give us judgment in all things.

ARE DANGEROUS IN VIEW OF THE REWARD

Seeking after small gifts has its grave danger if we consider the reward. God has set up a reward for all gifts presented to Him, a glorious reward, a reward of grace. And in this we see so plainly the great grace and goodness of our God. Gratis, without any merit of works on our part, solely for the sake of Christ's perfect merit, God gives us heaven and bliss. "For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Eph. 2, 8. 9. God is truly gracious and kind beyond measure. If we serve Him without pay, that is, purely out of thankfulness for the grace shown us in Christ, this our service shall, nevertheless, not be "gratis," inasmuch as He desires to crown all works done for Him with a glorious, eternal reward of grace.

In this light the good works of the Christians become enormously valuable. Luther says they are worth more than the whole world. The

world and everything in it will burn up on the last day; but the good works of the Christians will not burn up, but will follow them. Rev. 14, 13. Therefore we should not seek after small, but rather large gifts for Christ and His Gospel. The Holy Spirit reminds us of this when He says: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." 2 Cor. 9, 6. We are *wise* stewards of the earthly goods, given us by God, then only, when we give back to God again with full hands. There are many fools in the world. The entire unbelieving world is foolish. But the biggest fools are the Christians, if they, having means, seek after the smallest and fewest gifts possible.

A CONSTANT OFFENSE TO THE CHRISTIAN HIMSELF

With his seeking after small gifts the Christian gives *constant offense* to himself. For he thereby brings himself to doubt his own state of grace and the truth of the Christian religion. According to Scripture good works should be performed also for this purpose, that we may have in them an *outward* testimony of our faith. The Holy Spirit's *inward* testimony of our adoption as sons of God we have through our faith in the Gospel, which the Holy Spirit creates and preserves in us.

But the Holy Ghost, dwelling in our hearts by faith, now also spurs us on to good works in order that we may read this very testimony in our works: "You are a child of God, for you love the brethren, you love God's Word, His Church on earth is most important to you," etc. As surely as the works of the Christians flow, not out of the flesh, but out of the spirit, so we have in our works the *outward* testimony of the Spirit to our state of grace. In this sense Scripture speaks of sanctification and good works: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." 2 Peter 1, 10.

What do we do then if we are generally lax in sanctification and good works, and show a miserly spirit in giving for the Gospel? Through our seeking after small gifts, we are continually giving ourselves the testimony: "Your Christianity is in a bad way." Doubts regarding our state of grace are in many cases the result also of our miserliness in giving for the kingdom of God.

AN OFFENSE TO THE UNBELIEVING WORLD

This striving after small gifts, moreover, easily becomes an offense for the unbelieving world. As the world in general keeps close watch over the conduct of the Christians, it does so particularly with respect to the gifts of the Christians for their church. The world rejoices when it sees a Christian fall and telegraphs the news over the entire continent, because it sees therein a welcome excuse for its own unbelief. For the same reason the world is uncommonly happy when it observes that the Christians have much to complain about constant financial difficulties in their ostensibly so important work, and even take recourse to games of chance

and dubious entertainments in order to raise money. The last day will reveal how many children of the world were offended because of the avarice of Christians in giving for the Gospel, and thereby were lost. That the world takes offense is and remains its own fault. The Lord says: "Woe unto the world because of offenses!" He adds, however: "But woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!" Matt. 18, 7. Let us think of this in connection with our gifts for Christ's kingdom, and, by God's grace, conduct ourselves in this respect before the world, not unto offense, but unto edification.

AN OFFENSE TO THE PASTORS

Whoever seeks after small gifts easily gives offense also to his pastor. The pastors also are human and are often tempted by fear of man. If they observe this unwillingness to give and even hear such expressions, as this: "O this everlasting begging!", they lose courage to insist upon the word and will of God. They then make the rule crooked, and perhaps say: "Give at least of *your surplus!*" But where does Scripture say that the Christians should give of what they have left over? Neither the amount, nor the time and place of their gifts, is prescribed for the Christians. But the will of God toward them is that they give gladly and willingly, and that their giving for the kingdom of God should be a matter of primary importance. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things"—the needs of this life—"shall be added unto you." Matt. 6, 33. To say: "Give at least of that which you can easily spare" is contrary to the Word of God. We cannot keep from our Christians the truth that they must first of all serve the kingdom of God with their earthly possessions. Of course this goal is never perfectly attained and never will be. The flesh will prevent perfect obedience. But whatever is lacking in this respect must be acknowledged as a lack and a sin. The Christians should humble themselves before God because of this sin, beg forgiveness for Christ's sake, and pray God for strength to restrain more and more their godless, avaricious flesh.

We know that the Christians will never attain to perfect sanctification also in other things. But we do not for that reason remove the goal toward which they should strive. We do not tell them: "Avoid at least the coarsest outbursts of the flesh," but instead we urge them: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." 2 Cor. 7, 1. And so we dare not remove for the Christians the goal to make giving for the kingdom of God a matter of *primary* importance. Otherwise we would probably fall into error of "antinomism,"* as Luther puts it: we would be good Easter-preachers, but abominable Pentecost-preachers. Let us cheerfully tell the Christians the full and complete di-

*"Accordingly, we reject as a dogma and error injurious to, and conflicting with, Christian discipline and true godliness the teaching that the law in the above-mentioned way and degree is not to be urged upon Christians and true believers, but only upon unbelievers, non-Christians, and the impenitent." (Formula of Concord. *Concordia Triglotta*: p. 807).

vine truth in this matter. We will then have the Christians, in as far as they are Christians, wholly on our side. Walther reminds us that even the weakest Christian, after the new man, willingly and entirely desires to live for his Savior, who has purchased him with His divine blood.

GRIEVES THE HOLY SPIRIT

Whoever seeks after small gifts troubles the Holy Ghost who dwells in him. Every Christian, even the weakest, is a temple of the Holy Ghost. By the faith in the forgiveness of sins purchased by Christ, the Holy Spirit enters our hearts. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" 1 Cor. 3, 16. And the Holy Ghost is active in us. He fills us with love for God and the neighbor. He moves us to offer our earthly goods willingly and richly for Christ and His kingdom. If we do not follow the inward teaching and impulse of the Holy Ghost we grieve Him thereby, and may even drive Him out of the heart entirely. *Many a one has in this way lost faith and salvation, because he shut his heart against the needs of the kingdom of God.*

A HINDRANCE TO THE BUILDING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Whoever seeks after small gifts *hinders the building of the kingdom of God* here on earth. This is no small matter. The Son of God became man and shed His blood on the cross in order that a kingdom of God might be built up here on earth. "It behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations." Luke 24, 46, 47. The world still stands for the sake of the preaching of the Gospel. Matt. 24, 14. For the sake of the preaching of the Gospel, we Christians, who really ought to be in heaven, are still on this earth. It is just through us that this preaching should be done. That is the divine ordinance. For the proclamation of the Gospel Christ wants to use our prayer, our lips, and our earthly goods as well. How dreadful, if we hinder this building up of Christ's kingdom on earth by withholding our earthly possessions!

GOD IS PREVENTED FROM GIVING EARTHLY GOODS IN RICH MEASURE

Whoever seeks after small gifts thereby *prevents God from giving him earthly goods in rich measure*. God acts according to the rule laid down very clearly in Luke 6, 38, and in many other places: "Give and it shall be given unto you." This does not seem to agree in individual cases, because the ways of God with individual men are often so involved that it is difficult to distinguish the threads. God sees what is hidden from our human eyes, namely just why poverty, or a small amount of earthly possessions are necessary to keep an individual on the narrow way to eternal life. But in many instances even we will be able to observe that the liberal giver is richly recompensed by God. *I know people who have made themselves rich by giving.* They gave freely for the Gospel,

so freely that they were warned by cautious friends not to overdo a good thing. But they continued to give and, to the surprise of all, they became more well-to-do right along. They even recovered from heavy financial losses with astonishing quickness. God simply dealt with them according to His word: "Give and it shall be given unto you." *I have known people who have made themselves poor by giving.* They sought, in the matter of giving for the Gospel, not only after small gifts, but made use of certain circumstances to excuse themselves altogether, and behold! their financial prosperity suffered severely. And what they left their heirs was not a blessing for these, because it was "tainted money." That money is accursed which has been kept or inherited by depriving the Lord and His Gospel. God have mercy on us all! May He teach us to know this sin, repent of it, receive forgiveness through Christ's blood, and then withstand this damnable miserliness!

But are not Christians often poor because the fear of God does not permit them to take advantage of many financial opportunities through which the children of this world enrich themselves? Surely. The Holy Spirit indicates this when He says: "A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked." Ps. 37, 16. But in many cases the poverty of Christians, or a small amount of earthly possessions, is due to the fact that they give so little for the kingdom of God. God speaks to His people through the prophet Malachi: "Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in mine house, *and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*" Mal. 3, 10. This is true not only of the Old Testament, but also of the New, as we see from Luke 6, 38: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again."

THE WRATH OF GOD IS BROUGHT DOWN UPON THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS COUNTRY

Whoever seeks after small gifts *draws down the wrath of God upon himself and the land in which he dwells.* Read the first chapter of the prophecy of Haggai. The Jews had returned from the captivity and busied themselves gathering possessions and building homes for themselves. After they had taken care of themselves, they intended to build the house of the Lord. Through the prophet Haggai the Lord shows them the impropriety of such action. "This people say, the time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" And the prophet also shows plainly the punishment that should follow upon this sin. He says: "Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little . . . Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed

from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land and upon the mountains." In the New Testament God speaks of the same sin in terms no less sharp: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked!"

If we have drought and other plagues in the land, it is certainly a punishment upon the unbelieving world which does not heed God's Word and is ungrateful for bodily blessings. But we Christians, too, should examine ourselves at such times to see if we have not perhaps become an evil for our land through our ungratefulness and our miserliness toward the Gospel. The world is blind, but we Christians are wise. We know that all earthly goods come from God. We also know that through Christ we have heaven and salvation. *In addition we know that God gives us bodily and spiritual possessions primarily for the purpose of serving the preaching of the Gospel.* If we build our own houses and let the house of the Lord lie waste, then we must look upon drought and other plagues as a judgment of God, which begins first of all in the house of God, that is, in the Christians. It is high time then to repent, also to have public services of humiliation and prayer, and to give up seeking after small gifts for the Gospel. Luther carries this out in his foreword to the prophecy of Haggai, which he concludes with the words: "The Lord, too, wants to partake of the meal, otherwise the others shall have nothing to eat either."

GOD WILL WITHDRAW THE GOSPEL

Finally, whoever seeks after small gifts, instead of large ones, in giving for the preaching of the Gospel *thereby induces God to withdraw the Gospel from him.* That is the end, the greatest misfortune, that can come upon us. Luther's complaints about Germany are well known. He states, time and again, that in his day Germany had the Gospel as clear and pure as never before. But Germany's attitude toward the Gospel was one of sleepiness and indolence. Only a few gave willingly in the interest of the Gospel. This sin God would punish by the withdrawal of the Gospel. He writes: "They (the ungrateful ones) will lose both, the temporal and the spiritual. For upon this sin the heaviest punishments must necessarily follow, and I believe most certainly, that the congregations in Galatia, Corinth, etc., were brought to their ruin through false prophets for no other reason that that they neglected their true teachers." (St. Louis Ed. IX, 748). Let this be said for our own warning. At the present time we, too, have the Gospel as pure and unadulterated as the Christians in the days of the apostles. *Let us then take heed to show ourselves truly thankful to God for it, also by giving willingly and bountifully for the Gospel, so that it may be preserved among us and through us be spread far and wide.*

II. THE CAUSE AND CURE OF FINANCIAL LAZINESS

What is the cause of the financial indolence so often observed among us?

THE FLESH

This laziness proceeds out of the sinful *flesh* with which the Christians are still burdened. If the Christians were all spirit they would do everything in financial matters that God requires of them; they would *come running* with their earthly goods, in order to place at the disposal of their Savior whatever He needed. They would be making continual inquiries as to whether the Savior could not use more of their possessions. But the flesh of the Christians is just as evil as that of the world, as Luther often reminds us. Surely then the works of the flesh must needs be destroyed, also the works of the *miserly* flesh. That, however, is difficult work and is never fully accomplished.

AN EVIL CUSTOM

This laziness is the result of *an evil custom*. It is often an inheritance of state-church conditions. In the state-church little or nothing was given for church purposes, because the state usually paid the expenses of church and school. We live in a land in which the Church is independent of the government, and we rejoice over this fact. But in giving for the Church we conduct ourselves very much as if the Church were supported by the State. And this laziness does not always die out with the first generation, but is inherited, like other diseases, by the second and third generation.

A SPECIAL DELUSION OF THE DEVIL

This laziness is the result of a special *delusion of the devil*. The devil constantly aims to make Christianity contemptible and to hinder the kingdom of Christ. He attains this object if he succeeds in preventing the Christians from giving for the Gospel. Oh, how the preaching of the Gospel has been impeded down to our own day, also among us, because the necessary earthly means were not forthcoming!

UNCLEARNESS IN THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

Another underlying cause is *unclearness in the doctrine of justification*. It is thought to be harmful to the doctrine of the justification of the sinner without the deeds of the Law, if good works are urged energetically and continually, and to insist especially also that the Christians should above all things serve the kingdom of Christ with their earthly goods. That is, however, an erroneous opinion. The more earnestly we teach good works in a *Christian* manner, the more powerfully will we thereby always preach the Gospel. We bring forth good works, not through the threats of the Law, but through the charm of the divine grace shown us in Christ Jesus. Luther says as you well know: "Good works are done by heaven itself." If we want to warm the hearts of our Christians to sanctification and good works, then we always do one thing first: we lift them up into heaven. We remind them of the fact that they have forgiveness of all their sins and heaven through Christ their Savior. If we remind the Christians of this then they rejoice with exceeding joy,

gratitude rises up in their hearts, then they, too, would like to give their lives for their Savior. And when we tell them: For the present the Lord does not ask you to give up your life for Him. That may come later. But now the Lord asks you to give Him your colt that He may use it for His gracious entry into the world: then they are very happy and let Him have the colt and whatever He needs. Thus every Christian admonition to give becomes an inducement to preach the *Gospel*, fully, completely, and unconditionally.

THE CURE

Thus we have already reached the matter of *the cure* of this laziness. When we become cold and freeze, we stand close to the fire, and so when we Christians notice that the love for our Savior and the service in His kingdom begins to grow cold, then we should stand close to the fire of the divine love which is revealed to us in Christ Jesus. There the heart is warmed and thereby the "problem of giving," about which so much must be said and written, is solved. In our homes we have pictures of the Savior in one form or another, probably a crucifix. Now when the question of giving for the Gospel confronts us, and we glance at that Head crowned with thorns, then our gifts will take care of themselves, both as regards the right quality and the right quantity. We will give willingly and abundantly. These are not my thoughts, but the teaching of the Holy Ghost, for example, 2 Cor. 8. In this chapter the apostle admonishes the Christians to give, and in order to obtain gifts, correct in quality and quantity, he holds the Cross of Christ before their eyes. In verse 9 we read: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." If we follow this method *incessantly* then there will be no lack of "financial activity" on the part of the Christians.

OUTWARD HELPS

The Christians can and will give for the Gospel judiciously, willingly, and in the right measure, then only, when they are *acquainted* with the business and the needs of the Church. In this point we must remind two classes of people of their duty.

First, *the pastors*. The pastor has the duty toward the Christians committed to his care to direct their attention to any need that the Savior may have of their earthly goods. By virtue of his office he must see to it that the Christians in his charge abound also *in good works*, that they gather together a large treasury of good works in this life and thereby harvest an eternal reward of grace on the last day.

The first and main fruit of the preaching of the Gospel is of course faith in Christ and salvation. But the good works of the Christians are also an object of the teaching of the Gospel. The apostle Paul impresses this on Titus: "These things I will that thou affirm constantly that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." Titus 3, 8. And again: "Let our's also learn to maintain good works

for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful." 3, 14. The domain of good works is a very large one, but the foremost good work, for the performance of which the Christians are still in this world, is and remains: "Preach the Gospel unto every creature! Show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness unto His marvellous light. O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into a high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength!" That the Christians may do this most important work is the end and aim of the office of the ministry. And in order that the Christians may do this work intelligently, willingly, and in a large measure, *the pastor is in duty bound to inform his people continually of the need the Lord may have of their earthly goods.*

Thank God, this is done among us! I have noticed at synods how pastors and lay delegates sit with open note-books and make memoranda of the requirements, which in the opinion of the assembly, the Lord is asking of His Christians for the advancement of His kingdom. On the other hand we cannot and will not deny that pastors and teachers might do still more to acquaint our congregations with the needs of the kingdom of God. The pastor will have many obstacles to overcome in this regard, both with respect to his congregation and himself.

There are Christians in the congregation, otherwise exemplary, who are very willing to give and in a large measure for the needs of the local congregation, but are inclined to oppose the pastor as soon as he asks for gifts in the interest of the preaching of the Gospel elsewhere. This is a very dangerous sentiment for these particular Christians themselves as well as for the whole congregation. They who think and act like this deny a part of their calling as Christians and bring it about that the Lord will measure to them in their congregational work with the same measure, in which they measure to Him in the preaching of the Gospel elsewhere. The inner history of our Synod proves this. If experience teaches us anything, it is this: *those congregations have thrived best, internally and externally, which have been most diligent and zealous also for the so-called "extra-congregational purposes."*

But the pastor also has difficulties *with himself*. These too must be overcome. Doctor Walther in his lectures on §49 of his "Pastorale," used to say to his classes: "You will perhaps receive a small salary and thereby be filled with concern as to whether the congregation will supply your most important needs. If the temptation then comes to you to refrain, for this reason, from encouraging your people to give for missions, for the support of the synodical institutions, etc., please remember: *There is a divine nemesis* (punitive justice). The congregation will become more and more unwilling to supply your own needs. And that is a just judgment of God; for you are neglecting a part of your office." These are sharp words of Dr. Walther's, but altogether true ones. And they are good for us pastors and teachers, inasmuch as we, too, still have the flesh in us. Let us therefore, by all means, to the best of our ability, not neg-

lect to acquaint our Christians with the needs of the kingdom of God and to encourage them to give willingly and liberally! So much for the pastors.

But *every member of the congregation*, also, is obligated to keep himself informed as regards the requirements of His Savior. At synods I have heard the complaint repeatedly from lay delegates, when they heard that this or that treasury was burdened with a deficit: "Why did our *pastor* not tell us this?" Well, we have just finished speaking of the duties of the pastors. But let me put the counter-question: "Why did you, member of the congregation, not inform yourself?" You have the duty as a Christian to keep your own eyes open. Perhaps you do not even keep a church paper, such as the "Lutheran Witness" or the "Lutheraner," which will keep you in constant touch with the events and the needs of the kingdom of God. It is not only a small, but a very great, shortcoming, and truly a disgrace, if there are congregation members who do not read a church paper. They read the daily papers which bring the daily news and market reports. And they should do so because they are also citizens of the kingdom of this world. But since they have received the grace to be citizens also in the kingdom of Christ, they should keep and read diligently a paper which gives them the news of Christ's kingdom."

THE WELL-TO-DO AND RICH CHRISTIANS

The question has been asked repeatedly whether *the well-to-do and rich Christians* are to be especially encouraged to give in a larger measure. This has been denied occasionally and a corresponding practice introduced. I have learned to know congregations in which all voting members gave the same contribution, for example, for the current expenses of the congregation. This made little difference, in this respect, that the contribution was very small, so that the poorer members were not burdened by it. And yet this arrangement was unjust to the more well-to-do. It is a great injustice to the well-to-do not to expect them to give more of their possessions for the kingdom of Christ than those who are in less favorable circumstances. And the well-to-do themselves, as a result of their evil flesh, are in danger of speaking in favor of the uniform contribution, and saying: "It is very fine that we have the rule among us to give only small gifts. In other churches rich individuals give large gifts. But we give all Christians the same opportunity and thus the "widow's mite" is given high honor in our midst." Such talk may hide self-delusion and miserliness. Let each one examine himself! The fact is, that Scripture contains a *special* admonition regarding giving for the *rich*. We read, for example, 1 Tim. 6, 17ff: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." We find this admonition at the end of the First Epistle to Timothy. The apostle Paul

has already concluded and said Amen, verse 16. By inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he begins anew with a special admonition for the rich. In the Missouri Synod we are gradually becoming wealthy too. Let us then with God's grace read diligently 1 Tim. 6, 17-19 and act accordingly.

WILL THE WORD OF ADMONITION BRING ANY RESULTS

We have thus encouraged ourselves in a large measure and somewhat extensively to "financial activity." Will the word of admonition do any good? Surely! For it is written Isaiah 33, 24 of the Church of the New Testament: "And the inhabitants shall not say, I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." We are assured of the forgiveness of our sins through Christ. Therefore we are strong, strong also with reference to finances. Let us then be careful not to make ourselves weak! May such expressions as this: "The rich Catholic Church," be outlawed among us. Statistics show that the Protestants are on the average more richly blessed with this world's goods than the Catholics. In addition, we Lutherans are far richer than the Catholics in spiritual riches. Through the pure Gospel we are certain of the forgiveness of our sins. Thus we excel the Catholics in a two-fold sense. If we do not weaken ourselves, therefore, we will *willingly* give *more* for the Gospel, than they, under compulsion, give for the deceit of popery. May God grant us this grace!

